

**The Role of School Governing Bodies in School Academic Performance: An
Exploratory Study in Two Districts in KwaZulu Natal**

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October 2021 / PARI Working Paper

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October 2021

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List of Acronyms

SGB	School Governing Body
SIP	School Improvement Plans
SMT	School Management Teams
SDM	Service Delivery Model
SASA	South African Schools Act
HR	Human Resource(s)
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
PARI	Public Affairs Research Institute
SADTU	South Africa Democratic Teachers Union
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa

1. Introduction

School governing bodies (SGBs) are the nerve centres of schools in South Africa. Their main purpose is to create and maintain school policies, provide support to principals and other staff, and oversee general governance issues that are in the best interest of schools and their learners. SGBs have been afforded significant powers by the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA). SASA sought to set the parameters for improving the access and quality of education in South Africa post-1994, and also to provide space for parents, learners, and community members to participate in the governance of schools. Thus, through SASA, education governance has been significantly decentralised to SGBs (Bagarette 2011, Woolman and Fleisch 2008, Du Plessis 2020). The aim of decentralising education governance is to improve the quality of basic education and performance by seeking and inculcating the best interests of learners and schools through wider school community participation. However, SGBs' ability to play an effective role in the provision of basic education is significantly influenced by the conditions of the different schools' communities.

Using data collected through policy analysis and semi-structured interviews from three districts in KwaZulu Natal, this working paper demonstrates that the decentralisation of education governance to SGBs is ineffective in underperforming schools (Du Plessis 2020). The SGBs are not functioning as intended, as the literature illustrates, even in underperforming schools as the working paper shows. Despite the overarching legislation that empowers SGBs and the participatory democracy approach to education governance in schools, school governance remains in a critical condition because there is no targeted and strategic approach to strengthening the weakest parts of education governance within the education system. Instead, SGBs, particularly in underperforming schools are left to resolve the schooling demands — albeit with limited capacity building and support from district officials — thus consequently increasing the burden of school governance on principals.

Prior to the creation of SGBs through SASA, school governance was overseen by 'school boards or by school committees' (Hartell et al 2016: 123). In addition, the principal of the school played a central role in school governance, with their 'leadership style and framework reference [being] the main drivers of the school's ethos culture and impetus' (Hartell et al 2016: 121). Moreover, school 'governance structures' (Hartell et al 2016: 122), were not welcomed in black communities during apartheid because they offered little parental participation (Hartell et al 2016: 122). And were, moreover, symbolic of an illegitimate system. As part of the resistance to apartheid in general, and bantu education in particular, the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) introduced Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs), particularly in non-white, underserved schools during

apartheid (Sayed 1997: 357; Karlsson 2002: 328). Thus, the constitutions of SGBs post 1994 facilitated an inclusive and participatory approach to school governance. In addition to democratising school governance, SGBs serve as reminders of everyday practices of democracy for most communities (Woolman and Fleisch 2008: 51).

KwaZulu Natal is generally understudied in South African education governance. Moreover, the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education is the largest among the nine provincial education departments across South Africa. Over the years 2014 to 2019, six of the worst performing schools in South Africa were reported to be in KwaZulu Natal (DBE AR, 2019). However, there was a decline in underperforming and chronically underperforming secondary schools from 1,666 to 823, and 855 to 313 respectively from 2018 to 2019 (DBE AR, 2019). The province has the highest number of schools and learners covering both the rural, semi-rural and urban landscape (12 education districts) with the most un- or under-qualified teachers at an average of 60 per cent (SACE, 2015). While there are nine provinces in SA, KwaZulu Natal province enrolls some 21 percent of the 12 million learners in the SA schooling system. At the beginning of the past decade, KwaZulu Natal had nearly 2,687,490 learners enrolled in 5,952 public ordinary schools with 53 circuits, taught by approximately 88,373 teachers (KZNDoE, 2011/12 APP). These numbers have slightly increased, while the provincial learner:educator ratio in public ordinary schools is approximately 29:1. This figure conceals wide differences. In schools where parents are able to afford high school fees, additional teachers are hired by school governing bodies to keep learner educator ratios low. By contrast, schools in poor communities tend to have learner:educator ratios higher than the national average.

In terms of general academic performance, KwaZulu Natal is the second highest province to achieve pass rates between 90 and 100 per cent (233 schools) yet has the third highest number of schools that scored between 0 and 10 per cent. This illustration of academic performance is not only for principals and teachers to understand and correct, but it is also partly the responsibility of SGBs, who play a role in the performance of their schools. Therefore, in the context of a decentralised schooling system which is supposed to empower SGBs in issues such as the recommendation and appointment of teachers, underperforming schools in provinces such as KwaZulu Natal could use this system to improve learning outcomes.

The notion of 'underperformance' in South African schools is usually characterised by its opposite, 'performance' which is broadly defined in education governance policy in South Africa. The main policy on school performance is the National Policy on Whole School Evaluation (July 2001), which contains nine key areas: basic functionality of the school; leadership, management and communication; governance and relationships; quality of teaching and learning, and education

development; curriculum provision and resources; learner achievement; school safety, security and discipline; school infrastructure; parents and community (National Policy on Whole School Evaluation, July 2001: 5). Some areas of the evaluation are clearly under the purview of SGBs, who design policies in some of these areas. For example, the role of SGBs in teacher appointments directly affects the quality of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the whole-school evaluations are based on an evaluation of inputs, processes, and outputs of schools (National Policy on Whole School Evaluation, July 2001: 6). There are about 14 process indicators, a number of which are ostensibly linked to the role of SGBs, namely, the smooth running of school functions; whether leadership and management in schools are achieving the school's goals; ensuring quality teaching, curriculum planning and effective assessments; the willingness of 'governors [SGB members] to carry out conscientiously and effectively any responsibility they are given'; parental community involvement; and, the management of the schools resources (National Policy on Whole School Evaluations, July 2001: 6 – 7). Therefore, the functions and achievements of SGBs themselves contribute to the (under) performance of public schools.

By contrast, the education system categorises schools with less than 60 percent pass rate in Grade 12 (matric) as underperforming (See Bayat, Lour & Ren, 2014). Heystek (2015) also notes that underperformance also includes 'Grade Three and Grade Six literacy and numeracy (litnum) results' (Heystek, 2015: 1). Thus, performance is measured through the academic results of learners at key phases in their school years. Additionally, underperformance can also be characterised by the conditions of schools, known as dysfunctional schools. Christie (1998) identifies categories of a dysfunctional schools as inadequate physical and social facilities; organisational problems; poor school/community relationships and poor relationships between the education department and the schools. For Pretorius (2000) dysfunctional high schools in South Africa are those that achieved a 40 percent and lower pass rate in the National Senior Certificate (NSC).

The fact that school performance is measured primarily according to the NSC (grade 12) results, has led to an over-emphasis on the last phase and makes invisible the integration of assessments to improve learning across the grades. There are periodic interventions from various education stakeholders geared towards improvement in (school-learner-teacher) performance, and the concentration on matric results as the apex of school performance negates these efforts. There remains endemic underperformance in many schools across South Africa. Thus, the emphasis on SGB's role in governance cannot be limited in creating a conducive teaching and learning

environment without centering the direct and indirect SGB contributions that impact on academic performance.

This Working Paper finds that:

- The SGBs have the opportunity not only to be involved but also to actively participate in matters relating to improving learning.
- The SGBs attempts to contribute to the school's improvement is confounded by the emphasis on the SMT's role in leading the performance processes.
- The SIP is an example of an opportunity for SGBs to actively participate in academic performance matters.

1.1 Rationale

Initially, the study sought to investigate underperformance in schools as means to describe the concept, measures and problems around the underperformance in high schools. Generally, there is stigma associated with underperformance. We soon realised the limitations of sampling underperforming schools only, and the Covid-19 regulations further constrained access to such schools. Nonetheless, the relevance of SGBs is increasingly in question and as the literature suggests, there are limitations concerning capacity, functionality and accountability which hamper governance. Hence, the focus of the study is on the role of SGBs in school governance, with a specific reference to the SGBs' involvement in improving the quality of education, to determine the actual influence and role of the SGBs in underperforming schools.

The case study intended to do the following:

- Understand how the current practices of SGBs contribute to school's performance in KZN.
- Provide lessons for community participation efforts both in KZN, and in other provinces.
- Understand the extent to which the role of SGBs on academic performance is understood and conceptualised by principals, union members, SGBs and district officials.

1.2 Methodology

The general aim of the study is to document contemporary practices in relation to policy implementation, specifically, the execution of SGB's contribution in school academic performance. To achieve this aim, we explored areas in which SGBs are most active (visible participation) to contextualise their level of involvement in school improvement initiatives. The study further considered the type of institutional support from the district to the school levels that is extended to SGBs, where the principal acts as a common entry point for the community (SGB member) as well as an intermediary between the district and the school (representative of the Head of Department). Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the district and school levels to include officials, principals, teachers and SGB representatives. The districts in KwaZulu Natal were selectively chosen based on:

- (i) learner and school performance rates for the past 5 years;
- (ii) most to least poor quintile schools and;
- (iii) the geographic spread of semi-urban to rural.

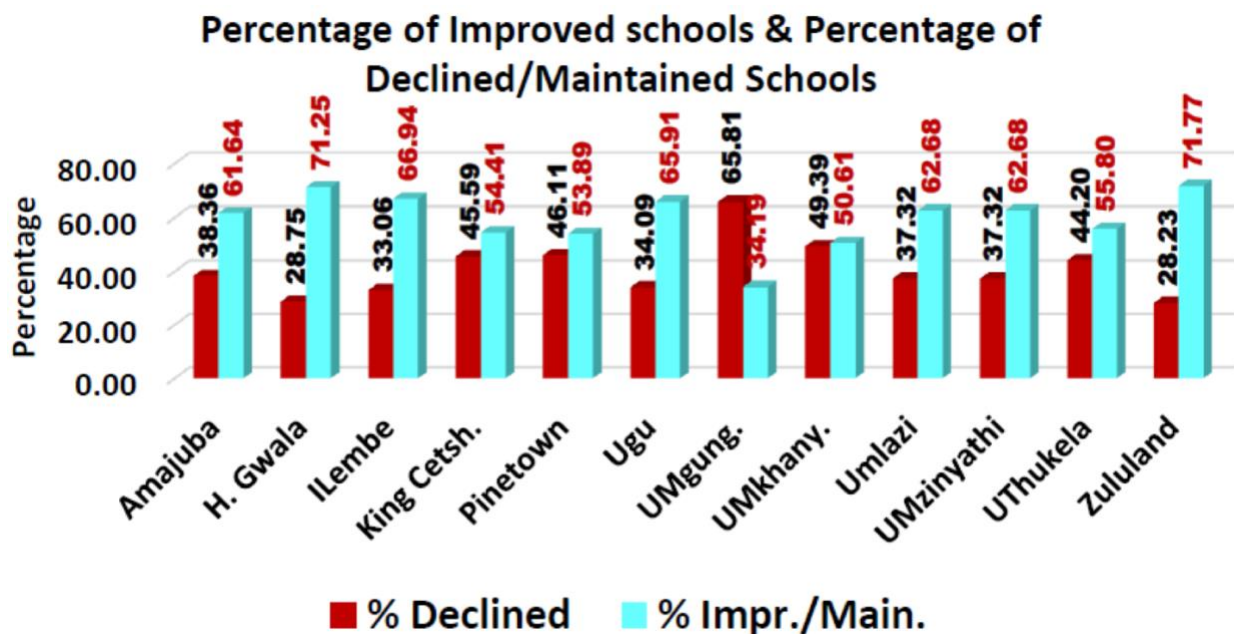
Initially, three districts that were selected based on the above criteria were Sisonke-Harry Gwala, Umgungundlovu and Obonjeni-Mkhanyakude. However, due to the limited accessibility of education stakeholders, largely because of poor and limited connectivity issues, Covid-19 adjustments and workloads, the third district had a poor turnout. As such, the working paper focuses on data from two districts: Harry Gwala and uMkhanyakude.

Nonetheless, the two districts still enable a reading of differences in the practices or understanding of the SGB role in improving school academic performance across various school settings (environments), namely urban (semi-urban schools in townships) and rural (schools in villages). The study received a provincial clearance in 2020 without any possibilities for site visits due to Covid-19 regulations. All interviews were conducted by telephone and online.

Over the five years, there is a consistent improvement of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination across the 12 districts in the province, with uMkhanyakude and Umgungundlovu as the least performing districts, with some improvements. The overall provincial performance was at 72.6 percent for the 2018 NSC results with a total of 123 schools achieving a 100 percent pass rate, of which 32 are quintile 1 schools (KZNDoE, 2020). There is a broader unevenness in performance across and even within districts, as illustrated over time in the table below.

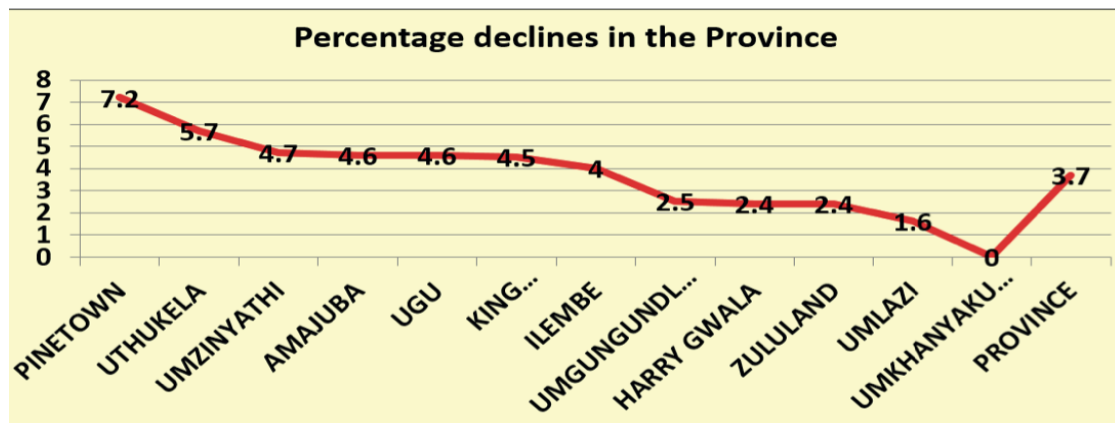
COMPARING THE PAST 4 YEARS OF THE NSC EXAMINATIONS					
		IMPROVED		DECLINED	
Districts	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Zululand	53.58	57.97	64.83	73.8	8.97
UMzinyathi	46.57	58.13	65.01	73.1	8.09
UGu	60.2	65.39	73.08	79.6	6.52
ILembe	51.93	52.42	64.91	71.1	6.19
Harry Gwala	62.75	63.97	66.83	71.9	5.07
UThukela	61.09	67.7	72.85	76.13	3.28
King Cetshwayo	54.59	63.42	71.64	73.9	2.26
Pinetown	64.65	66.38	75.51	77.4	1.89
Umlazi	72.64	74.42	75.48	76.76	1.28
Amajuba	58.75	72.22	80.51	81.7	1.19
UMkhanyakude	62.69	69.17	77.01	78.1	1.09
UMgungundlovu	67.98	76.38	81.51	77.5	-4.01

Source: KZNDoE Annual Performance Plan 2019/2020



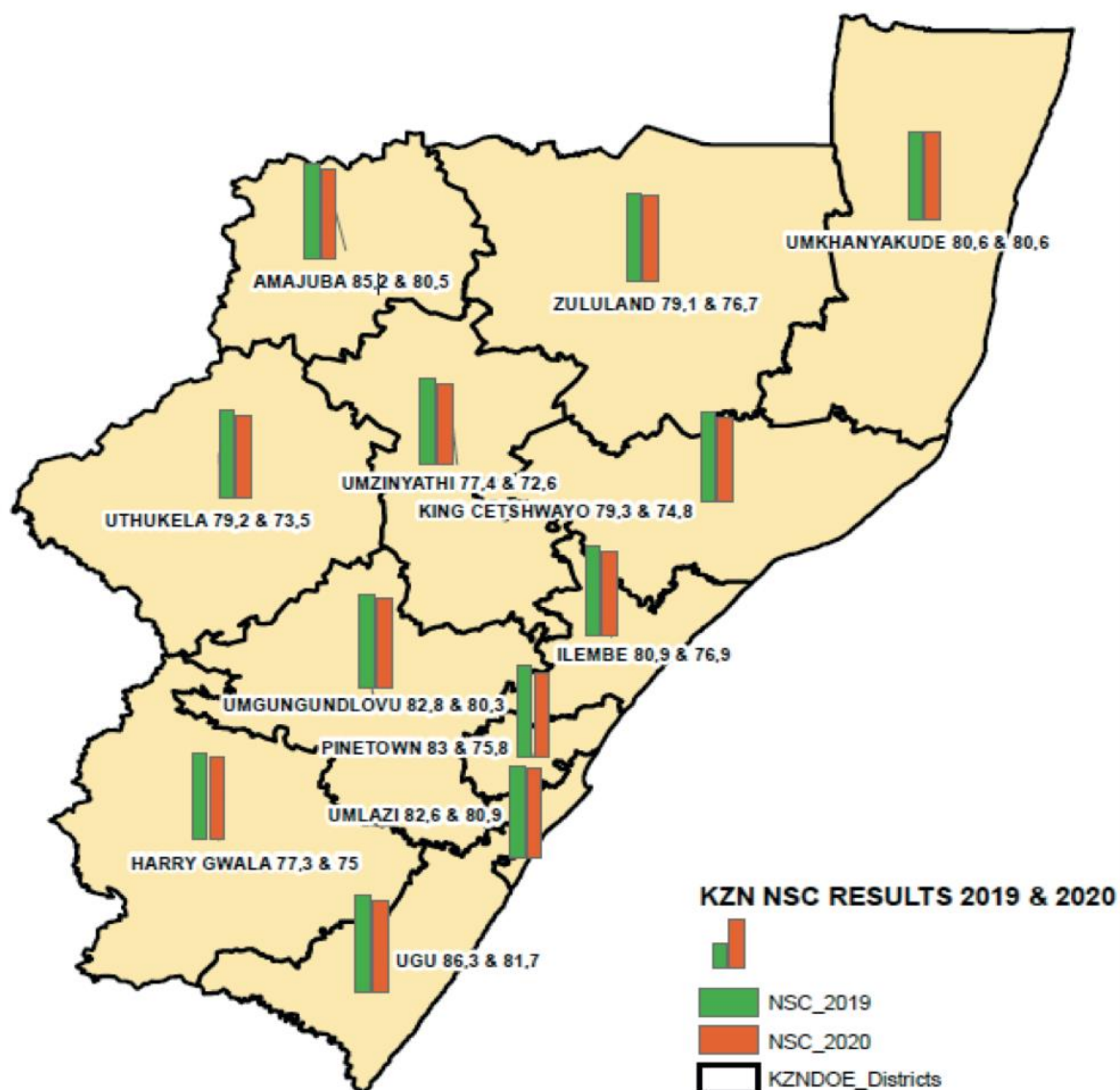
Source: KZNDoE Annual Performance Plan 2019/2020

The department attributes much of the improvement to several interventions such as the Academic Improvement Plans; teaching and learner support programmes, such as winter classes; and holiday camps, including weekend classes with emphasis on critical subjects like mathematics, physical sciences, accounting and economics (KZN DoE, 2020). Despite the various interventions, districts such as uMkhanyakude illustrate a fluctuation in school performance, through which there is recorded improvement over the years; yet in 2020, it was marginal (less than 1 percent difference between the decline and improvement rates). On the other hand, Harry Gwala is among districts with significant improvements, yet its overall performance in the past three years remains in the middle tier.



Source: KZNDoE Annual Performance Plan 2021/2022

The KwaZulu-Natal NSC results improved from 76.20 percent in 2018 to 81.30 percent in 2019. The year 2020 saw a decline in the overall NSC pass rate due to Covid-19 disruptions. The provincial pass percentage in the year 2020 NSC examination declined to 77 percent (KZN, 2021). The health pandemic exacerbated inequalities even within the education sector, it is therefore interesting that the former Zululand and the more semi-rural Umkhanyakude experienced low decline in performance in relation to the more urbanised Pinetown.



Source: KZNDoE Annual Performance Plan 2020/2021

1.3 The Role of SGBs in Democratic South Africa

According to the South African Schools Act 1996 (SASA), an SGB oversees ‘the governance of every public school...[and] stands in a position of trust towards the school’ (SASA 1996, Section 16 (1) and (2)). The membership of SGBs comprises elected members and coopted members, according to Section 23 of SASA. Members of the SGB include the principal who is the *ex officio* member representing the Head of Department. The elected members are the parents or guardians of learners at the school, educators (teachers) and non-educator staff at the school including student representatives — learners from Grade 8 upwards. Coopted members of the SGB do not have voting rights in the governance body; but it is possible that they can influence the decisions of the governance body, especially where they have expertise that is required for decision making. It is worth noting that many SGBs do not arrive at decisions primarily through voting, but through mobilised consensus of the meeting. Nonetheless, section 31 of SASA stipulates that term of office of a member of a governing body other than a learner may not exceed three years, and they are mandated to meet at least once every school term, according to SASA.

All SGBs must have a constitution and must undergo training; as well as be supported in carrying out their duties (SASA 1996, Sections 18 and 19). Training and support is provided by the Head of Department (HOD) (their delegate) of the relevant provincial education departments and the relevant school principal (SASA 1996, Sections 18 and 19). In addition to this training and support, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) provides training materials and guidelines on its website, as do some provincial education departments.

SASA allows SGBs to have normal functions and allocated functions, according to Section 20 and Section 21 of the Act. Normal functions are the prescribed and expected duties of governing bodies, as outlined in SASA (see information box below); while allocated functions must be applied for by schools, in writing, from the Head of Department of the relevant provincial education department where the school is located. The interpretation of Sections 20 and 21 of SASA has led to the distinction between schools with different functions in South Africa, according to the part of SASA that is being applied in their local school. Thus, ‘Section 20’ schools have limited governance powers within their schools, while ‘Section 21’ schools have a greater amount of power, usually financial power, which allows them to undertake plans and activities to improve schools. These plans and activities include buying the schools textbooks and materials, which is usually done by provincial education departments for Section 20 schools: and, managing the finances of the school —

especially fundraising. The financial management of Section 20 schools is discussed below.

But the differences between Section 20 and Section 21 schools are not just legal interpretations of SASA. One of the differences between these categories of school is the fact that Section 20 schools are usually historically disadvantaged schools due to the segregation and fragmentation of the apartheid school system, and bantu education in particular. Section 21 schools are ones that were historically advantaged in the sense that they were well resourced under the apartheid education system and have maintained essential governance practices that have allowed them an efficiency and autonomy not experienced by Section 20 schools. The differences between these schools has created 'sub-systems' (Du Plessis, 2020: 170) in the South African education system. In pursuing this research, it is precisely Section 20 schools that this working paper will focus on.

The Role of the SGB

School Governing Bodies (SGBs) came into existence in 1996 through the **South African Schools Act** (Act 84 of 1996), which bestows them with the governance of the school. School governance entails determining the policy and rules under which a school is organised and controlled (DBE 2004). According to provisions in SASA, public schools are to be managed by a school management team (SMT) and governed by an SGB. Section 20 (1) of SASA, specifically states that the role of SGBs is to,

- (a) promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all Learners at the school;
- (b) adopt a constitution;
- (c) develop the mission statement of the school;
- (d) adopt a code of conduct for learners at the school;
- (e) support the principal, educators and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions;
- (f) determine times of the school day consistent with any applicable conditions of employment of staff at the school;
- (g) administer and control the school's property, and buildings and grounds 5 occupied by the school including school hostels. if applicable;
- (h) encourage parents, learners, educators and other staff at the school to render voluntary services to the school;
- (i) recommend to the Head of Department the appointment of educators at the school, subject to the Educators Employment Act, 1994 (Proclamation No. 103 of 1994), and the Labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act No. 66 of 1995);
- (j) recommend to the Head of Department the appointment of non-educator staff at the school, subject to the Public Service Act, 1994 (Proclamation No. 103 of 1994), and the Labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act No. 66 of 1995);
- (k) at the request of the Head of Department, allow the reasonable use under fair

- conditions of the facilities of the school for educational programmes not conducted by the school;
- (l) discharge all other functions imposed upon the governing body by or under this Act; and
 - (m) discharge other functions consistent with this Act as determined by the Minister by notice in the Government Gazette, or by the Member of the Executive Council by notice in the Provincial Gazette' (SASA 1996, Section 20).

Section 28 pertaining to the regulations of elections.

It is important to distinguish between the SGB and school management teams (SMTs). Whereas SGBs comprise elected and coopted members of the school community, SMTs 'consist of the principal, deputy principal, and heads of department of public schools' (Bagarette 2011: 225). In addition, SGBs oversee the governance of the school in terms of its general policies and finances, while the SMT oversees the daily administration and operations of the school. As will become clearer later in this paper, SGBs can either overstep their boundaries with the SMT or, abandon their responsibilities to the principal who is a member of both the SMT and the SGB.

Among the functions of the SGB, is the support of principals and teachers to promote the best interest of the school but not necessarily the professional management of staff (Heystek 2010). This is a function of the school management team, discussed below. According to Heystek (2010), SGBs are not able to fully perform their functions 'if they are totally excluded or prevented from involvement in the professional activities of schools' (Heystek, 2010:102). Involving SGBs in the professional activities of the school is important because it a continuation of co-governance, more specifically facilitates informed participation as opposed to mere signoffs on school demands i.e., procurement processes or teacher appointments as advised by the principal. However, there are various interpretations on the role of SGBs on academic performance is couched as 'support' and oversight'. For instance, Section 5 of the SACE Act of 2000 states that the role of the SGB is to support the curriculum. On the other hand, principals and the SMT report that parents overstep their role. The overstepping of SGBs is tied to the understanding of the role of SGBs in socialising learners through behavioural development and youth support programmes (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004; Dladla 2013).

Following the promulgation of SASA in 1996, the Education Laws Amendment Act (ELAA) was enacted in 2007. The ELAA provides governing bodies with more power to improve quality education — to be outlined shortly, and read with Section 19 of SASA also empowers HODs to dissolve or

curtail the powers and functions of the SGB. Prior to the ELAA (2007), most of the functions mentioned in SASA did not include much parental involvement in professional activities in schools. However, with the specification in ELAA that parents become more accountable for the quality of education because principals must table their improvement plans to the governing body and this could imply that governing bodies (and for that matter the parent majority) may claim more involvement in the professional activities of schools. This is especially the case when schools do not perform according to the expected academic standard.

1.4 The Powers and Effectiveness of SGBs

Much of the analysis of the powers of SGBs focuses on power relations between the principals and SGB (See Heysteck, 2003; Bagarette 2011), the financial management by SGBs (Mestry, 2006), teacher appointments and disciplinary protocol (Volmink Report, 2016), and the nature and scope of SGB roles and responsibilities (Gann, 1998). In terms of the power relations within SGBs, sometimes there is a clash between principals and parents of the SGB because parents believe that 'they are the most important group in the SGB and that they have the greatest interest in the school' (Bagarette 2011: 227). As a result, parents want to control the school through its decisions and powers, as opposed to working with the principal to improve the school, its learning environment and its performance outcomes. However, as alluded to earlier in this working paper, this reaction by parents to principals is partly a historical legacy of apartheid, when 'decision making was entirely vested in the principal' (Bagarette 2011: 227). Despite the overall shifts in legislation and structures behind SGBs in South Africa, the integration of parents in school governances is still with tensions on overlapping roles and contestation of power within schools and their communities.

The role of principals and parents in SGBs is a crucial element for the effectiveness of SGBs. According to Bagarette (2011), principals and SGBs have 'successful partnerships' (Bagarrette 2011: 230) when SGBs understand their role and differentiate this role from the role of other school structures, specifically SMTs. Many SGBs do not understand their roles and functions or, they misinterpret their functions, which leads to them interfering in the management of the school, as opposed to the school's governance (Bagarette 2011: 231). For instance, parents who physically show up to schools during the school day to ensure that teachers are teaching; to lock and unlock the school gates every school day (Bagarette 2011: 231). Nonetheless, the presence of parents in class also emerges from the need to monitor both absenteeism of both learners and teachers. This does not only demonstrate a misunderstanding of the role of SGBs, it also demonstrates

micromanagement of schools, which is not within the purview of SGBs. This scenario also demonstrates that SGBs are not as powerless as some of the literature suggests. Rather, SGBs can exercise a large amount of control over the school by assuming responsibilities that are not theirs, thereby reducing the autonomy of the management team

SGBs also have the power to make recommendations about teachers' appointments, as per Section 20 (1)(j) of the SASA (Davies, 1999). However, the irregularities that have surrounded these appointments in the past has seriously questioned this specific power of SGBs. This was evident in the Volmink Report (2016), also referred to as the *Jobs for Cash report* commissioned by the Department of Basic Education. The report detailed investigations into allegations of large-scale corruption in education, through buying and selling teacher posts in provincial education departments.

The Volmink report was heavily criticised by the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) and teacher unions. (FEDSAS is one of a number of bodies formed since the 1990s which represents the interests of school governing bodies, especially parents). In 2016, FEDSAS submitted a report to the Basic Education parliamentary portfolio committee, noting that the Volmink Report was inconsistent on the interpretation of appointment of teachers and sought to clarify the legal framework that enables SGBs to make recommendations on the appointment of teachers. If an irregular appointment is made it simply means that the HOD has not applied and/or considered the checks and balances contained in the framework for the making of recommendations for appointment (FEDSAS, 2016:8). This point sought to contextualise the opposition to the report's Recommendation 6, which proposed that SGBs powers to appoint Post Level 2 and above staff should be taken away. Since the Volmink Report (2016), principals, unions and employees of the department are amongst the education stakeholders advocating to limit the powers of the SGBs through the amendment of SASA, possibly through centralising the power in DBE concerning teacher appointments, learner admissions and language policies.¹

FEDSAS (2016) further challenged the assertion that SGBs lack capacity to execute their functions regarding teacher appointments by pointing to the fact the Department of Basic Education is responsible for the capacity development of SGBs. Where this training has been initiated, FEDSAS is sceptical of the quality of training provided. This was not the first time that the capacity development of SGBs had been criticised, as a responsibility of the provincial department. SGBs are

¹ <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/schools-slam-changes-to-act-20200210-2;>
<https://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/kwazulu-natal/new-bill-will-stop-sgbs-appointing-school-principals-40355727;>
<https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/277493/new-amendments-to-school-legislation-could-leave-sgbs-out-in-the-cold;>
<http://www.702.co.za/podcasts/176/the-best-of-breakfast-wib68th-bongan111ci-bingwa/279915/new-bill-to-curb-sgbs-powers-in-the-appointment-of-principals;>

not adequately or not trained at all before they begin their tenures as elected school officials (Van Wyk (2004); Beckmann and Prinsloo 2009; Heystek 2010; Sithole 2011 and Xaba 2011). Consequently, many SGBs are ineffective in discharging their duties due to unfamiliarity with meeting procedures, language used, managing large volume of papers, not knowing appropriate legislation, feeling intimidated by those who are knowledgeable and the perception that as newly elected officials, the SGB is simply endorsing what other members of the SGB have already decided on i.e., the principal of the school.

Considering the outlined limited capacity of SGBs, there are multiple stakeholder efforts driven by the government sought to train SGBs. For instance, an initiative that attempted to fast track the skills and capacity development of education staff, including SGBs, is the Performance Management and Development Programme. This programme was a collaborative initiative involving the KZNDE supported by DBE, Performance Solutions Africa (PSA), the University of KwaZulu-Natal and PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2009 (PMDP Annual Report, 2017). Additionally, the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, ABSA and the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) also offered finance training at no cost to the SGB because it had an agreement with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) as means to ensure that there is better management of the school's finances.

The DBE also provided funds to schools to pay for their registration to participate in such bodies as well — for example, FEDSAS or the Governing Body Foundation of South Africa (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2019). Provincially, the training and support of SGBs is primarily implemented by district officials in two main categories: school governance through the induction of newly elected SGBs, and financial management. It is the latter that is usually facilitated through public-private partnerships. Each cycle of training of SGBs differs, depending on the availability of resources and secured partnerships. Between 2010 and 2015, the province trained 5 939 newly elected governing bodies, specifically the SGB Finance Committees (KZN DBE, Strategic Plan 2010/11-2014/15).

The decentralised system of education governance is supposed to provide more opportunities for the involvement of parents and learners in schools' governance, which has been shown in some cases to be associated with positive learner performance (Mncube 2005; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk and Lemmer 2008). In addition to the latter, the decentralised system of education governance has also led to democratic school governance (Mncube 2005; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk and Lemmer 2008), which implies the transfer and sharing of power between the state and the school. However, democratic school governance and the resulting increase in learner performance has been uneven. There are still several instances where parents and learners are excluded or have limited participation in SGBs

(McBride 1991, Gutman and Midgley 2000, Chikoko 2001, Senechal and LeFevre 2002, Lemmer and Van Wyk 2004 and Mncube 2007)

There are significant hindrances to the effectiveness of SGBs. As far back as 2004, the Kader Asmal Review Report noted five weaknesses in SGB governance: (i) skills deficit among the SGBs, (ii) contextual limitations such as transport funds to attend meetings and school safety, (iii) poor attendance and low participation, (iv) lack of teamwork through individual dominance, personal interest, and lack of trust, and (v) underrepresentation of parents (Kader Asmal Report 2004). The Ministerial Review Committee Report (DBE, 2004) acknowledged that there is insufficient capacity concerning crucial dimensions of the work of school governance, such as managing accounts, appointing educators, developing policies in critical areas such as language, discipline, religion, and the fee structure of the school.

The weaknesses identified in the Kader Asmal Report have become more acute. The skills deficit within SGBs is often attributed to the literacy levels of parents as members of SGBs (Hartell et al, 2016). This is, undoubtedly, the reason why training initiatives by the Departments of Basic Education and provincial education departments is crucial for the effectiveness of SGBs. In terms of participation, parental participation in SGBs is low (Karlsson 2002). This hinders the effectiveness of SGBs because 'despite having the majority, in other schools' parents were reticent, relying on the principal and educators for leadership and guidance in decision making. Parents' low levels of participation were also attributed to a weak understanding of their role, a capacity deficit in the range of skills needed to perform all the governance functions, and contextual communication and transport difficulties. Many of these factors are directly related to poverty and the under-development and discrimination accumulated during the apartheid era' (Karlsson 2002: 332). Therefore, parental participation in SGBs is shaped by socioeconomic factors such as high unemployment, poverty, low literacy levels and limited development initiatives in communities.

Where trust is concerned, this has different interpretations, it remains low, and it is difficult to maintain. The SASA states that the SGB is in a position of trust towards the school. But what this trust means and how it is used is still not clear. One of the interpretations of trust is that the school principal should relay information to parents and the SGB as swiftly and confidentially as possible, which means that learners should not hear information that their parents and the SGB should be privy to, in order not to disrupt their learning. However, principals sometimes hide information from parents, who later hear this information from learners; or parents and the SGB inappropriately communicate sensitive information to learners and the wider school community (Hartell et al 2016: 129). This breakdown in communication leads to a breakdown in trust and compromises the work of

an SGB, as its members become distrustful towards each other. Additionally, Mestry (2006) is of the view that the management of school funds contributes to the distrust between the principal and the SGBs as previously the principal oversaw managing the school's finances prior SASA which assigns this responsibility to the SGBs- they now feel disempowered by legislation. Furthermore, SGBs sometimes abuse the trust that they have in relation to their relevant schools. The misuse and misappropriation of school resources through fraud and theft significantly undermine the efficacy of school governance (Bagarette 2011: 231).

From a national perspective, the DBE, in its role to support the establishment and functioning of SGB, started several initiatives. For instance, *Programme Three: Education Human Resources and Institutional Development*, which is responsible for promoting quality teaching and institutional performance through the adequate supply, development, and utilisation of human resources. One of its performance indicators includes tracking the percentage of SGBs that meet criteria in terms of effectiveness, with a set target of 80 percent of 200 sampled schools (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 22 October 2020). These initiatives also include the SGB Survey Report.

2. Findings: Emerging Themes

While SGBs is bound to proactively engage the schooling demands within their communities, this depends on strengthening SGB capacities, cultivating parental participation, and the effective relationship of shared (cooperative and collaborative) governance between the principal and the SGBs. SGBs have an integral role to play, both directly and indirectly, in the improvement of their schools and learner performance through (i) SIP signoffs by SGB members, (ii) facilitating the availability of qualified teachers and learning material, and (iii) policy formulation. Improving learner performance is an urgent need in schools where less than 60 per cent of learners pass their matric exams. The mapping of SGB participation trends and tendencies as they (directly or indirectly) relate to academic performance provides empirical examples that enrich the understanding and analyses of the role of SGBs in school governance.

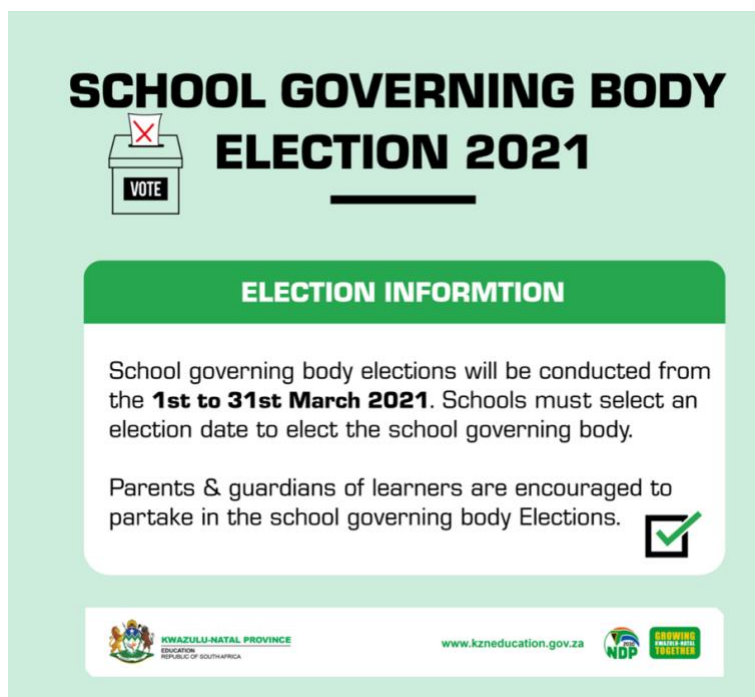
To map out the parameters in the role of SGBs in academic school performance, we relied on three categories: decision-making power, teacher appointments and the SGB elections. The first two findings featured consistently across participant responses to the most significant powers of SGBs or areas of contention with SGB involvement. The ability of SGBs to exercise their decision-making power bestowed by SASA is dependent on the nature of district support and the extent to which the support in a form of capacity building is implemented within resourced institutional arrangements. Whereas the process of teacher appointments indicates competing interests on secure employment and access to resources by diverse education stakeholders including parents. The following section of this working paper describes these main themes emerging from the data.

2.1 SGB Elections

The first SGB elections were launched in 1997 as part of the earlier transformative initiative to devolve authority to local structures. Since then, elections are held, as per the legislation, every 3 years. In their existence the SGBs have made contributions,² in line with their mandate, in these main categories: (1) procurement of Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) for learners in all grades, (2) National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), (3) Recommendations for the appointment of teachers to the Head of Department, (4) development of governing policies such as admission, language and school fee policies, and (5) contributing towards the improvement of grade

² <https://www.gov.za/i-cronje-launch-sgb-elections>

12/NSC results and supporting school managers. Despite the delays, and challenges experiences, the 9th SGB elections in 2021 were not cancelled. This marked the sustained commitment to parental participation and influence on the governance of schools. However, the quality and fairness of these elections under the hybrid model is beyond the scope of this paper. As a response to the Covid-19 health pandemic, a hybrid approach to SGB elections was introduced in some schools, and included electronic voting were possible depending on the availability of cell/internet data, and physical gatherings limited by social distancing regulations. The elections were initially scheduled for 01-31 March,³ but were extended to 30 April 2021 due to Covid-19 related delays such as the reopening of schools due to infections.⁴ We focused on the elections, as a present opportunity to locate the entry of parental participation through SGBs, and to further interrogate the participation beyond compliance to elucidate the reluctant participation in elections as a disruptive starting point.



Source: KZNDoe Facebook Page

³ See Government Notice No. 43889 of 2020
https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202011/43889gon1192.pdf

⁴ http://www.edu.limpopo.gov.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=398:mec-boshielo-to-launch-the-school-governing-body-sgb-elections-programme&catid=25:the-project

At the beginning of the election season, six⁵ SGB formations tabled their concerns at the Basic Education Portfolio Committee on 05 March in parliament. The United Front for School Governing Bodies highlighted how Covid-19 further exacerbated the continued cuts in education funding with the re-allocations of resources to accommodate Covid-19 materials at the expense of other requirements such as teaching materials, services, and maintenance for schools, as well as affecting teacher posts and infrastructure backlogs etc. The Governing Body Foundation noted that the SGB associations' ability to contribute to decision making was undermined at all levels as the consultation regarding preparations for the elections did not facilitate meaningful engagement. The challenges were primarily on receiving timely information from the department, such that without clear and timely information schools were left confused as they could not plan accordingly. Consequently, trust in the DBE and most PEDs was low as SGB associations perceived that they had experienced an 'erosion of rights', with the DBE seeming 'unresponsive, directionless and vacillating'. These failures lead to the associations feeling of being permanently in reactive crisis mode' (Governing Body Foundation, 2021).⁶

From the interviews conducted for this study in KwaZulu Natal, there are two Covid19 related impacts first, the extended duration of elections introduced an added risk of manipulating the elections. Secondly, community mobilisation was limited by the Covid-19 restrictions with minimum face to face gatherings, thus contributing to the poor participation (Union 1 Big 5 region). Part of the delay in the elections was based on the unavailability of funds, previously people were hired to orient parents, but the pandemic limited information-sharing and the preparation of communities through advocacy to participate in the SGB elections. Part of the Covid-19 challenges included limited distribution of invites for the election process to parents due to the school platooning schedule. Consequently, some principals used different approaches to mobilise parental participation. For instance, some principals compelled learners to bring their parents to school, and of course some parents declined the nominations. As such parents received updates through learners, some of the invites arrived late while others were not received. Both the nomination and voting process took several meetings to clarify the process with inconsistent participation due to fear of Covid-19 school infections. (Principal 1: Mkhanyakude).

⁵ United Front for School Governing Bodies, the Governor's Alliance, Federation of Governing Bodies of SA Schools, the National Association of School Governing Bodies, the Governing Body Foundation and the South African Principals' Association.

⁶ See link to the SGB formation presentations: <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/32463/>

The timing in the advertising of teacher posts oftentimes coincides with the appointment of new SGB members who are yet to be oriented on their roles (SGB Association 1). During the Covid-19 resource allocation processes, the SGB elections occurred simultaneously with the appointment of food handlers for the implementation of the National School Nutrition Programme (SGB Member: A). Some observed irregularities included the introduction of the voters roll two days prior the elections, and some of the parents were excluded from standing for elections based on technical errors. The SGBs were also concerned about the limited access to voter's roll by parents. For example, only one observer per association was placed at the voting station. (SGB Association 1). Lastly, the district deployed election officers are often met with suspicion based on selective bias facilitated through principals, hence the call for an independent electoral body. The assumption is that the district officials set up opportunities for principal candidates they prefer, and not solely based on merit.

The Covid-19 context raises question about the adherence to guidelines, including the provincial preparedness of the hybrid modes of elections (where applicable), and advocacy reach through community mobilisation. For instance, according to the national guidelines⁷ of the SGB elections, section 8.1 (a) states that voters' roll must be closed seven days prior to the elections, and 8.2 notes that at least 14 days prior to the election parents must be informed of the voters' roll. These are two examples to indicate how some of the mentioned irregularities created distrust in the election process, even though these emanate from the Covid-19 restrictions.

The guidelines further clarify the appointment of the School Electoral Officer (SEO), which is a principal of another school delegated by the district director as a presiding officer. The SGB formations propose an independent electoral system to counter the selection bias, based on familiarity and networks at the district-school level, also considering their limited oversight role with a single representative allowed per SGB formation in a school. The transparency of the process, and the need to diversify the oversight role to lessen the district over-dominance are suggestions to strengthen the credibility of the elections.

⁷ <https://propracticum.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GUIDELINES-RELATING-TO-ELECTIONS-OF-SCHOOL-GOVERNING-BODIES-OF-PUBLIC-SCHOOLS-2021-draft-1.pdf> or KZN version [https://cms.fedsas.org.za/Files/Documents/KZN%20Composition%20and%20election%20of%20members%20of%20Governing%20bodies%20ELSEN%20Schools%2018%20Feb%202021\(2\).pdf](https://cms.fedsas.org.za/Files/Documents/KZN%20Composition%20and%20election%20of%20members%20of%20Governing%20bodies%20ELSEN%20Schools%2018%20Feb%202021(2).pdf)

The section highlights the election limitations under the Covid-19 pandemic, however, low participation during elections, withdrawal of nominees, and poor sustained involvement in school governance post the elections characterise the complexities of SGBs even though the elections are consistently held on time. The elections are illustrative of the interface between state (department of education) and the community serviced by the school on local dynamics of governance and the contestation of power over resources and development initiatives, representation of the community interests, and responsiveness to community needs. The timing of the elections is often around the month of March, in the first school term and in the beginning of the financial year. To expect any decision making on resource allocation including both teacher appointments and procurement processes without any training including post-election induction, is to increase the responsibility on principals to the exclusion and disempowerment of SGBs. The section below further discusses the contradictions of decision making in shared governance amongst diverse stakeholders.

2.2 SGB Decision Making Powers

*Over the last number of years SGBs have had various powers and functions taken away. So, we need to examine does the SGB envisaged in early 1997 exist today? The answer is the SGB today is not what was envisaged in the early days. – **Governors' Alliance** (2021)*

The SGB elections give credibility to the SGB as a governing structure which primarily exists as a collective problem-solving entity that is community centred in its interest while promoting a teaching and learning culture at the school level. On one level, the shrinking powers of SGBs as articulated by the Governor's Alliance are underpinned by the tension between low parental participation and areas of involvement where participation exists. It is worth noting that the SGBs and SGB associations are not homogenous collective entities, as such race and class are underpinned by geo-histories of schools which in turn project the inequalities in the community. For instance, the spectrum from low participation due to illiteracy, economic migration in working class and poor communities versus skilled to active professionals as SGB members in affluent urbanised settings.

The findings from our study under this theme are consistent with the literature. Generally poor parental participation in school affairs is a persistent limitation, as such the quorum for SGB meetings is often unattainable for decision making in schools (Union 2: Participant A). SGB challenges lie in the misunderstanding of the core business of the SGB's role in school governance. Government attempts at capacity building are constrained by the community's low education levels, resulting in the 'burden on principals' left to lead and implement the vision of the school (Union 2:

Participant B2). Similarly, Hartell et. Al (2016) observed that rural SGBs are illiterate and uncertain about their role in SGBs, such that the low levels of education limit SGB participation. Even though training is also prescribed under SASA as a necessary condition for the state to support SGBs, the state has not invested enough resources and allocated budget for effective training, monitoring and follow-ups to sustain support and development of SGB throughout their three- year cycle.

What appears to be over reliance on principals, is defended by district officials as a necessary investment of capacitating principals that enables consistency during the various changes in SGB leadership (District Director, Mkhanyakude, CES Harry Gwala). The unintended practice in the overreliance on the constant principal reproduces the lack of collective decision making in planning for the school. Consequently, it also normalises unilateral decision making by the principal (characterised by the over reliance on principals, SGB passive-compliance) — who becomes an ‘all-rounder’ who drafts the minutes, chairs the meetings, presents, and resolves challenges. The results are SGBs that function as crisis committees evoked only to endorse decisions taken outside the SGB structure, thereby legitimising the unilateral decision making by the principal or what Mokoena and Machaisa (2018) refer to as *principal-dominated SGBs*.

One of the participants cautioned that while there must be efforts to co-opt skilled SGB members such as professionals or activists experienced in education stakeholder engagements, but that the challenge at times is that the social status and education levels amongst SGB members also skews participation towards the dominance by a few i.e. *ayiphikiswa induna* [no one speaks against the local chief] or ‘the respectables’ - *abahlonishwa* (Principal 3).

Participants also noted the inconsistent reporting by principals to the SGBs and inconsistent inclusion of SGBs in initiatives such as the School Improvement Plans (Union 1 Big 5 region; Union 2 Participant A; SGB Federation 1). The SGB members and associations attribute the monopoly of decision making by the principal to the lack of effective communication which would empower the SGB to undertake informed decisions. The nature of the context is such that information is directed from the district to the school level through the principal, who communicates via smses, letters and through meetings with parents. When the transmission of information is broken, it impacts on the duties of the SGBs. While there are efforts to capacitate SGBs through training, the districts remain without means to verify the participation of SGBs or the misuse of power by principals in the SGB structures, especially in the absence of an effective education forum inclusive of various stakeholders. Ultimately, our study amongst underperforming schools found that the elected SGBs

exist within a relationship of unproductive collaborations characterised by principal-dominated SGBs.

Participants noted that in some provinces SGB federations are not allowed to recruit school SGBs, who they would train and provide support throughout their tenure. The main function of SGB federations is to provide support and training to SGBs across South Africa (SGB Federation 1, Participant B & C). SGB federations also have access to different parts of the education system, including regular quarterly meetings with senior levels of provincial education departments; and with the national DBE (SGB Federations, Participant A). However, some of the efforts to provide training for SGBs, so that they understand their role in school governance, has been blocked by principals (SGB Federations, Participant A & C). This is worrying because the two biggest roles of SGBs is the development and implementation of school policies: and support for the management of schools (SGB Federations. Participant A). Without the necessary training, SGBs are ineffective. The active engagement of federations as allies to SGBs disrupts the narrative of principals as the main source of information and support

Other than the low participation of parents in school governance, and the lack of SGB federation representation to increase parental participation through training, most participants identified the financial oversight and participation in teacher appointments as the two notable areas of SGB involvement. Officials feel that part of the problem in this regard is that SGBs require far more capacity building to play an effective role in financial oversight and teacher appointments. For the officials this is based on the capacity mapping of SGBs; the financial strategic management and oversight is thin with limited knowledge of budgeting processes, often characterised by signoffs based on the what the principal reports, but ‘...what is glaring is the minimum involvement in curriculum delivery’ (CES Harry Gwala Region). The CES alludes to the lacking strategic oversight to point to the relationship between resource allocation or prioritised expenditures and its contribution to the overall performance of the school. The literature on the school finance committee and the SASA related prescriptions is vast, often highlights compliance procedures of policies and the mismanagement of funds. However, the school financial management can also be used to discredit principals, such that the SGBs become the ‘watchdogs’ of the finances especially if they do not support or have lost confidence in a principal (Union 2; Participant B, Principal 1&2). It seems the tactic applies regardless of the principal’s performance as the determining factor is whether they are an acceptable candidate for the SGB. As such, the decision-making power in the governance of schools is also framed through the matrix of manipulation and imbalances of power. Furthermore, ‘There are contradictions of education policy on school financial management processes, more

specifically in the SGBs committee. There are overlapping roles and division along with the delegation of authority between the school management processes of procurement and quotations' (Federation 1).

Other participants highlighted the nature of volunteerism as a contributing factor in low interest to serve as SGB members:

There is growing resentment from SGB members based on their inability to receive remuneration for the duties as stipulated by SASA Section 27 (2). So, you have parents serving as SGB members who are unable to benefit from the PPE, school nutrition and other school procured services. iSGB membership iyalambisa! [SGB membership will starve you] – Principal 3.

Schools are sites of development in low-income communities as such the SGB membership is a hindrance in securing access to income-generating and skills building opportunities. Even though the SGBs cannot be positioned as beneficiaries of any school programmes devolving decision making power includes the facilitation of greater participation of diverse education stakeholders. Nonetheless, the financial management, in so far as securing the necessary service (teacher) or resources (infrastructure i.e., temporary extra classes) that facilitate the improvement of teaching and learning (service delivery) indirectly impacts on the improvement of the school academic performance.

2.3 District Support of SGBs

School governing bodies need additional support, as well as compulsory courses. Their governance mandate involves extensive responsibility for finances and setting internal school policies, among other things- *National Development Plan, Chapter Nine: Improving education, innovation, and training*

The responsibility to train and support SGBs is primarily implemented by the district office. On an annual basis the provincial departments commit to sampling several schools to assess and monitor the *effective functioning* of the SGBs, following a criterion in terms of effectiveness with indicators such as an (i) existence of an elected SGB, (ii) quarterly meetings and (iii) budget presentation to parents. Also, as part of the provincial annual performance plans (for an example, see KZNDoe APP 2019/2020) there are targets such as *Schooling 2030 goals: Goal 22 Improve Parent and Community Participation in the Governance of Schools* and *Goal 25: Use the school as a location to promote access amongst children to the full range of public health and poverty reduction interventions*. The

phrase associated with the training and supporting interventions of SGBs is ‘capacity building’, the language of professional development is reserved for the training of teachers. Under outcome 4 of the APPs the department commits to *capacitate* the SGBs to (i) recommend competent managers to lead their schools, (ii) to support school management and govern the affairs of the school effectively.

The education stakeholders acknowledge the training offered by the department through the district officials deployed to train principals and SGBs through workshops, the limitation with these is that they are sporadic. Participants, for instance, referenced the necessary focus on financial management training, but these are reported as once-off workshops often dominated by the teachers and principals (Union 2, Principal 2, Federation 1). Other than the financial management, training tends to focus on the category of governance which includes induction for the newly appointed SGBs or might include orientation on one or two policy formulation areas such as the code of conduct, language, and admission policies. A simple survey of the annual reports for the past five years indicates that most legal cases pertaining to SGBs centre on policy formulation evoking language, religion, or the issue of school fees. These complaints rest on the axis of discrimination and exclusion that limit access for a particular candidate or group. Thus, the inclusion of policy formulation is seemingly a responsive approach to these cases.

MTSF IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2020/21 Outcome: Professional, meritocratic and ethical public administration								
Outputs	Output Indicators	Annual Target	Quarterly Target	Activities	Timeframe	Budget per activity	Dependencies	Responsibility
Trained SGB members	% of SGB members trained on code of conduct.	517	129	Train SGB members on the code of conduct	31 March 2021	R10 000	Finance Human Resources	Governance and Management
Preparation for the new SGB election process in all 5 957 schools started across the province	No. of schools that started preparation for the new SGB election process.	5 957	1489	Prepare schools for SGB Elections	31 March 2021		Finance Human Resources	Governance and Management
SGB members of 2000 schools trained on the code of conduct on integration and racism	No. of schools where SGB members were trained on the code of conduct on integration and racism	2 000	500	Train SGB members on the code of conduct on integration and racism	31 March 2021	R10 000	Finance Human Resources	Governance and Management

Source: KZNDoe Annual Performance Plan 2020/2021

In the Annual Report 2018/19, the training is not accounted for, but only the monitoring of SGB effectiveness. In the 2019/2020 Annual Report, there is reporting on the training is on financial management. If we consider the fact that the last SGB elections were held in March 2018, these two SGB updates read together give an indication of the sporadic training that is not sensitive to the timing nor responsive to the demand of skills at the school level. If the SGB three-year cycle, only

offers a once-off training in the second year (without any follow-up monitoring, exchange visits or skills transference) throughout one SGB cycle against the many calls to capacitate SGBs, then there is a structural bias to maintain the (under capacitated) SGB, to claim existence even if dysfunctional as an effort to include parents and communities in school governance. There is a need for a greater transparency on the allocation of funds to capacitate SGBs. For example, the image above accounts for R20 000 in the financial year plans of 2020/2021 with a target of 2517 out of approximately 5957 schools, while the image below of the Annual Report 2019/2020 shows financial management training that reached 2 438 in four districts.

Activity	Current Standard 2018/19	Desired Standard 2019/20	Progress Report 2019/20
Develop a policy pack on financial management policies	Some schools lack financial management skills	Improvement of the management of government finances in the Department of Education	Two thousand four hundred and thirty eight (2 438) members of SGBs were trained on Legislation pertaining to Financial Management: Amajuba: 30 UMkhanyakude: 788 Harry Gwala: 668 UMgungundlovu: 952
Develop a system of compliance in writing the submissions on matters with financial implications	Lack of compliance in preparing submissions by some schools	Improvement in of compliance in writing submissions on matters with financial implications	There was a 90% improvement on compliance in writing submissions on matters with financial implications
Develop a pack of constitutional mandates that relate to the delivery of education	Lack of knowledge for constitutional mandates by some of our schools	Improve constitutionally correct management of the Department of Education at Head Office, District, Circuit and School levels	Two thousand six hundred and eighty one (2681) School Management Teams (SMTs) attended "Let's learn from what learners are learning" which was conducted from 6 - 23 May 2019.
Develop a guideline on integrity and ethics relating to the delivery of education	Lack of understanding of the core values of the Department	Improve compliance with the code of ethics at Head Office, District, Circuit and School levels	Guideline on integrity and ethics relating to the delivery of education were developed
Develop credible relationships with relevant potential education supporters in the private sector	Insufficient relationship with the private sector	Improvement of the final programme and improvement of teacher output and performance of learners	Higher Education institutions were able to supply a suitable cohort of educators to meet some of the curricular needs of the Department. This together with in-service training and support from the private sector as well as NGOs improved the ability of learners to read passages with comprehension and to answer questions. This has led to learners understanding examination questions better thus resulting in better academic results.
Development of the 2019 academic improvement plan for the province	Unavailability of the academic improvement plan to some schools	Final plan document distributed to all relevant structures.	Academic Improvement Plan for 2019-20 was developed and implemented.

Source: KZNDoe Annual Report 2019/2020

Policy formulation and subsequent policy implementation by SGBs, is also identified as an integral issue by SGB federations. According to SGB federations, part of the weaknesses of SGBs is that there is a 'breakdown' (SGB Federation Interview 1) between themselves, provincial education departments and districts, particularly district directors. According to SGB federations, district officials often interpret policies differently to the interpretation in provincial education departments.

They start creating their own implementation plans; they start creating their own communication processes, without engaging with the [SGB] association as to what's going to be happening, without having the trust of the associations, and trust is a two-way

street...And on an individual level, relationships are built with school governing body members and individual districts, but only in times of crisis; not in times of further development or advancement or the main topic – as uplifting underperforming schools (SGB Federation Interview 1).

This illustrates two additional problems in terms of district support to SGBs. Firstly, districts only utilise SGBs reactively, to fight policy battles and not to create long term strategies for the improvement of underperforming schools. Moreover, much as SGBs should be concerned with school policies, which is their core area of work, the interpretation of policies is different between education stakeholders. This could lead to ineffective policies, and it has already ruptured the relationship between provincial education departments, districts, SGBs and SGB federations. Secondly, the sporadic nature of training indicates that there is no strategic importance being placed on the role of SGBs, by districts.

2.4 SGBs and Teacher Appointments

Education stakeholders have also observed various challenges pertaining to the role of SGBs in the appointment of teachers. These challenges include: (i) appointments are not consistently based on merit of competence, partly this was articulated in the Volmink Report as the sale of posts; (ii) and the limitations of unfilled posts because of disputes amongst the school stakeholders which further destabilise the school (Governing Body Foundation, 2021).

KZN has been in the news more than other provinces about the contestations over the appointment processes. Most participants (education employees, principals unions except for SGB members) were of the view that SGBs should not be involved in the hiring of principals and deputy principals, especially in communities with an average of under-educated parents without even a national school certificate to adjudicate over the appointment of a more educated candidate. Nonetheless, such SGB powers should be retained for all the other appointments in the school (Union 2 1&2, Union 1: Participant A, Principal 1)- which was also supported by district officials. This approach promotes the hiring of teacher candidates based on merit and competency skills for both the applicant and the selection panel.

SGB federations, on the other hand, advocate for the consistent application of SGB powers to recommend teacher candidates, but with greater support from the districts to increase the skills of SGBs rather than to reduce their powers (SGB Federations 1, Participant A & B). For SGB federations,

the recommendation of teacher appointments in schools is well within the ambit of the role of SGBs, according to one federation, curtailing this power amounts to ‘illegal teach appointments’:

Illegal placement of educators without the recommendation of the governing body is probably the biggest trend that we’ve seen coming through (SGB Federations interview 1).

Court action against the provincial education department and schools.

In one district, the promotion and placement of teachers is mediated through the notion of the ‘son of the soil’ which is the insistence to hire people from the communities serviced by the school (Union 1: Participant 3). In such instances, there is high unemployment and poverty, and the school is one of the few sites of development and potential source of work. Other examples, include SGB conservatism in managing [inappropriate and illegal]⁸sexual relationships between teachers and learners (Union 1: Participant 1), or the inclusion of sexual reproductive health topics in Life Orientation (Principal 3). The community matters spill over the schooling context as such the preferred teacher/principal candidate is expected to hold similar values, after all the school is an institution for socialisation. One participant (Union 1: Participant 3) noted how local government campaigns in the form of dominant party politics implicate teachers, giving the example, that the African National Congress is associated with SADTU and the Inkatha Freedom Party with NATU. Both unions have interest in ensuring the hiring of its members. Thus, the region is characterised by the influence of party politics active in the communities which in turn reproduce interest in who teaches at the school and participates in its governance. The ‘Son of the Soil’ concern and party politics represent the interests of parents/communities and that of unions on teacher placements, respectively. The SOS practice can be evoked by parents with party political ambitions or a teacher seeking employment, either way, the practice serves to contain access in the name of local development and whoever yields it inherits the task to mobilise- by persuasion or force, however, the scope of the paper does not allow further discussion on such tactics. But to give an example, if a teacher appointment is received as an imposition by the department rather than a collective decision of the school, then the unintended consequent includes teacher feuds on roles and responsibilities which destabilise teaching in classrooms (Union 1: Participant 3). Other concerns included the:

- I. Practice of the provincial department convincing SGBs not to advertise posts, to permanently absorb short-term employed and acting staff,
- II. How unions dominate the selection panel,

⁸ For learners younger than 16 years old who cannot legally consent to any sexual consent, see the definition of statutory rape

- III. Timing in the advertising of posts oftentimes coincides with the appointment of new SGB members who are yet to be oriented on their roles, and therefore easily manipulated by both the principal and the unions
- IV. District oversight is unchecked; from how they process the SGB recommendations, and the extent to which they suggest candidates through the principal

With the recommendation that SGB associations should be granted observer status on teacher appointments as they would assist in the mediation of disputes which is currently managed through the district officials on behalf of the department.

It was reported that the issue of undue influence by unions on teacher appointments, creates a bias when unions report nepotism facilitated by SGB members to the district, the complains are often nullified by the department (Union 2: Participant 1). On the other hand, the tension of loyalties is illustrated when SGBs are treated with suspicion and perceived to be 'sell-outs' for appointing teachers not supported by/from the community (Union 2: Participant 2) or when principals advocate for candidates based on merit against the son of the soil phenomena (Principal 1). The district forums which are an entity of diverse education stakeholders set up by the district directors, in some instances, were able to diffuse such tensions using coordinated consultation with stakeholders seeking to clarify the collective power of the SGBs against the perceptions of districts imposing candidates for the school posts (District Director, Mkhanyakude).

2.5 SGBs and Academic Performance

The appointment of teachers, the availability of LTSM, infrastructure development, acting as ambassadors in championing campaigns addressing social matters such as anti-crime initiatives, the ability to raise and manage school funds are amongst the core functions of SGBs mentioned by participants which contribute to the creation of a conducive teaching and learning environment. Participants also indicated that grade 12 extra classes (over the weekends and during holidays) and the School Improvement Plans (SIPs) sign off as the most notable direct contributions to the school academic performance.

As part of the Whole School Evaluation (WSE), schools are required to annually develop and implement SIPs, to monitor and examine regularly sourcing its plans from the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process. The SIP focuses on learner performance improvement. (DoE, 2002). SIPs are one of

the many instruments which require the input and support of SGBs. The broader understanding is that the principal should present the subject plans to the SGBs which in turn feed into SIPs and were the challenges lie pertaining to teacher availability and learner participation.

However, in practice the principals submit these for compliance with little or no input from the SGBs. The challenge with such practices is that there are no systems at the district level to verify the SGB inputs (Union 2: Participant 1, SGB Federation 1). Nonetheless, the improvement of the subject performance is led by the principals and the School Management Teams (SMTs). As a consequent, the SIPs are perceived to be 'acts of compliance led by the principal with less consultation involving parents and SGBs. Moreover, the district officials have limited means to verify the inputs of SGBs on SIPs, they rely on the accountability and reporting lines of the principal as both an SGB member and employee of the department (District Director 1, CES 1, Union 2: Participant 2).

One of the participants argues that 'Academic performance lies in the realm of the principal and the management team' (SGB Federations 1). The imagination of the SGB powers and its potential to effectively govern in ways that contribute to schooling performance are limited by (i) the conflicting interpretations of support and oversight roles on governance and management, (ii) the currently under capacitated SGBs (iii) and the over reliance on teachers. All the participants unanimously believe the SGB to be necessary entity within the education system, and that SGBs cannot cease to exist regardless of their current limitations.

3. Conclusion

Although the SGB elections were not part of our original research aims, the challenges faced during the SGB elections held in early 2021 signified something important about the lack of parental participation in underperforming schools in KwaZulu Natal. Specifically, the fact that parents did not show up for the SGB elections; and in some cases; declined the nomination for SGBs. The reasons expressed for this absence of parents is telling lack of the necessary information about the elections, the timing of the provision of the voters roll for the elections and the Covid-19 pandemic. These are factors that cannot be blamed squarely on the lack of parental participation, as suggested in the literature. For instance, some studies suggest that limited parental involvement in SGBs, mainly in low socio-economic communities, is affected by factors such as unemployment and poverty, and lack of supportive familial structures which relate to time constraints due to resource mobilisation and constraints (Karibayeva and Bõgar, 2014, Munje and Mncube 2018). Moreover, there could be few motivating factors for parental participation in underperforming schools. In other words, the research in education governance, as it pertains to school governance, should focus more on the factors that hinder parental participation in SGBs; both SGB elections and participation in SGBs as governance instruments in schools.

Therefore, education governance in South Africa needs to examine how inequality and class play a fundamental role in school governance, as these are the factors that directly impact on parental participation in SGBs, and indirectly affects the SGB's interaction and engagement in learner performance in underperforming schools.

On the other hand, the effort of principals in forging ahead with SGB elections despite the lack of parental participation, puts an unfair and undue strain on principals. This has been evident in the literature, where principals are forced to be overseers in management and governance in situations where they should not be. Principals are an integral part of SGBs precisely because they oversee the operations and management of the school, while also accounting to SGBs. But the lack of parental participation in important processes and meetings of SGBs, places pressure on principals to singlehandedly make decisions, where these decisions should be collective decisions with parents and other members of SGBs.

The lack of capacity of SGBs in underperforming schools is partly a result of the lack of training, and the type of training, that is being provided by districts and desperately needed in the context of low-income communities. This provides a different dimension to the issues of capacity of SGBs, particularly whether SGBs understand their roles and functions, and the levels of literacy amongst

parents who are in SGBs. What this case study has found is that in fact, the training the SGBs receive is sporadic, rather than strategic and reactive to the legal challenges, and without long-term planning. Therefore, SGBs in underperforming schools are not able to improve the performance of their schools because training from the districts is ineffective.

Finally, SGBs in underperforming schools are being weakened further by the illegal appointment of teachers in schools. This could be taking place in well performing school too; but it becomes acute in underperforming schools that have constrained resources and capacity. In addition to this, the political dimension to teacher appointments could demotivate SGBs from fighting against illegal appointments altogether.

Recommendations

Participants were encouraged to share suggestions in most areas they were interested or concerned with, the proposed suggestion are to:

- Design separate capacity building approaches that attend to SGB members (who are intimidated by principals and knowledgeable teachers) distinct from the principal and teacher focused training. However, this has implications for the capacity of district officials with regards to the availability of personnel and resource to cover even the isolated rural schools targeted training for parents.
- In light of the district capacity limitations, some advocated for the training of SGBs through the SGB formations- this includes the allocation of training funds to the SGB formation.
- Mix languages during training instead of the over reliance on English.
- Include SGBs in the policy updates & debates: Acts and regulations are continuously amended without moving orientating SGBs which in turn contributes to the inefficiency
- Provide incentives for the SGB training workshops that could include certification of training, or service certificates that indicate the skills attained while serving the school in the different committees to attract and motivate SGB participation

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